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**ROBERT BURNS'S LIFE ON THE STAGE:
A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DRAMATIC WORKS, 1842-2019**

Thomas Keith

Playwriting has engendered an impressive number of creative responses to Robert Burns that variously attempt to embody, lionize, challenge, or define him. The purpose of this bibliographical survey is to gather information currently available about when, where, why, how, and by whom Burns has been depicted in the theater. Each of the ninety stage works detailed here—from Scotland (59), the United States (20), England (6), Canada (4), and Australia (1)—illustrates some aspect of Burns's life or influence. All of these plays or musicals are meant to be performed by actors or an actor, in character, and can be enacted or recreated by other artists, not ultimately reliant on the personality or abilities of any particular performer.

Rhona Brown has proposed a valuable way to understand dramas about Burns: as “biographies come to life.”¹ During the first century of these plays, up to the 1950s, they indeed tend to be primarily about whatever aspect of the Burns biography each playwright chose to explore. In that sense, in addition to having a theatrical style, most of them could fairly be understood as “historical drama” or “biographical drama,” rather than as modern dramatic literature. The stories about Burns's life that these playwrights tell are occasionally fictional, however, for the most part, they relate directly to verifiable incidents from his life or influence. What varies more widely are the interpretations of the actions, relationships, and motivations of those biographical events.

While traditional biography aims to assemble a narrative that is also an accurate record and interpretation, faithful to life and history, akin to documentaries, biographical plays are overt fabrications striving to convey an interpretation of the truth. In this playwrights face a conundrum: how to transmit historical information through stylized period dialogue along with

¹ Rhona Brown, “Robert Burns on the Twentieth-Century Stage,” in Ian Brown and Gerard Carruthers, eds, *Performing Robert Burns: Enactments and Representations of the ‘National Bard’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 120.

action that will ring true for audiences. During the Victorian era and well into the twentieth century, audiences were not concerned with realistic-sounding dialogue in the way that they are today—characters spoke in a theatrical idiom, or in verse, which, though not true to life, was commonly accepted as suitable for the stage. The challenge for contemporary playwrights whose audiences expect more realistic-sounding language can be demanding because theatrical dialogue is composed—it is a construction, no matter how believable it may sound. While some playwrights have endeavored to craft a balance between a sense of relatable twenty-first-century dramaturgy and eighteenth-century Scottish speech, others have opted to use colloquial modern speech—in the vein of the Broadway musical *Hamilton*—which audiences tend to accept more easily and which allows the author to place more focus on narrative and metaphor. Twenty-first-century anachronistic dialogue also adds a facet to performance that can be liberating for both audience and performer.

Character traits conferred on Burns in drama spring from the fact that he was a farmer, poet, and exciseman who lived in eighteenth-century Scotland. Chief among these traits is dialect. Scots vernacular and vocabulary as most often rendered in the available playscripts is either a synthetically composed Scots, a traditional composite of both English and Scots vernacular, English only, or English phoneticized to be spoken with a Scots accent (usually mixed with a little Scots vocabulary). The English playwright John Drinkwater said about his plans for a drama about Burns, “One thing I am determined upon is to avoid the pitfall of dialect. Unless one happens to be a Scotsman it is almost impossible to write in the language of Burns.”² That was not the only pitfall ahead of him. Conversely, working-class Scottish playwright Joe Corrie switched back and forth between English and a mixture of Scots vocabulary and English phoneticized as a Scottish accent, as it suited his needs.

Symbols of Scotland and Scottish identity are an intrinsic component of theatrical and cinematic responses to Burns, whether or not an artist is making entirely conscious choices about them. From the long list of signifiers that have become associated with Scottishness, the bagpipe and the kilt are the nationalist symbols found most frequently in these plays, though their connection to Burns is limited. Even after the Dress Act of 1746 was lifted in 1782, the kilt and the Highland pipes were not often seen in the lowlands of Scotland while Burns was alive, except perhaps in Edinburgh; aside from the iconic image of the devil playing the bagpipes in “Tam o’Shanter,” mentions of the pipes or the kilt in Burns’s poems, songs, or letters are rare. More recently, the pipes and the kilt seem to have become primary emblems of Scottishness outside Scotland. Their overuse

² *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (18 June, 1923), 9.

can represent what is variously identified as “Tartantry” or Harry Lauderism, and can also be called a *Brigadoon*-effect in theater and cinema. Commodification of various ethnic stereotypes in America has its roots in the minstrel show and vaudeville. In the United Kingdom, performativity of Scottish ethnicity became more pronounced after the appearance of Sir Walter Scott’s novels and King George IV’s royal visit in 1822. The success of the 1940s American musical fantasies *Brigadoon*, which has little substantively to do with Scotland, and *Finian’s Rainbow*, bearing even less to do with Ireland, typify how this trend continued into the mid-20th century.³ Subsequently directed for MGM by Vincent Minnelli in 1954, *Brigadoon* remains a touchstone for a certain kind of reductive and artificial Scottishness, and is referenced throughout the later half of this bibliography.⁴ Longstanding and ubiquitous components of Burns Night Supper rituals, the bagpipes or the kilt (or both) were incorporated into the following plays and stage musicals: *Auld Lang Syne*, *Great Scot!*, *Scot Free!*, *The Ayrshire Ploughman*, *Red, Red Rose*, *Annie Laurie: A Story of Robert Burns*, *Lights and Shadows*, *Ready Aye Ready*, *Robert Burns* (1927), *Comin’ Thro’ the Rye*, *King o’Men*, *Rab the Rhymer* (1984), *Robert Burns: Out of Print*, and *Robert Burns—The Musical*. In the final scene of *Great Scot!*, the character of Burns spuriously dons a kilt to demonstrate his independence from English oppression. Two other twentieth-century musicals use Scottish symbols completely unrelated to Burns in their titles to signal the Scottishness of their content—*Annie Laurie: A Story of Robert Burns* and the unproduced *Highland Fling*.

Few of the playwrights could resist weaving text from Burns’s poems, lyrics, and letters into the dialogue spoken by the Burns character. The presentational nature of this fabrication impedes a more nuanced understanding of his personality. Though the issue is rarely addressed by critics, a reviewer of *Comin’ Thru the Rye* by Warren P. Munsell, Jr. at the Berkshire Playhouse in 1948, remarked that the author showed “frugality in the employment of Burns quotations, limiting them to comparative few and seeing that those he uses drop in logically.”⁵ As it happens, Munsell’s

³ The title is an amalgam of the phrase brig o’ Doon, made famous in the poem “Tam o’Shanter,” and signals a reliance on Burns as a source of *Brigadoon*’s Scottish credentials; see also Ian Brown, *Performing Scottishness: Enactment and National Identities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 214-217, 222-224.

⁴ In one instance, Hollywood’s lack of Scottish authenticity did receive pushback: when Paramount Pictures announced in 1945 that the middle-aged American crooner Bing Crosby would play Burns in a movie musical *Coming Through the Rye*, protest letters came in from Scots and Burns aficionados around the world; however, it is not known why the film was never made. *New York Times* (17 December, 1945) A17; *Spokane Chronicle* (5 April, 1946), 10.

⁵ Kingsley R. Fall, in *Berkshire Evening Eagle* (6 July, 1948), 6.

use of Burns quotations in the dialogue was not all that much more frugal than the playwrights who came before him. This contrivance also works as a kind of expository commentary on Burns's Scottishness, creative process, or ethos that some audience members may find enjoyable but which situates Burns as more of a symbol and less of a person. Some of the playwrights took this a step further by employing the unwieldy trope of having the character of Burns compose a poem or lyric in front of the audience, the artificiality of which produces additional performativity or commentary.⁶

Putting Burns's fictional characters, especially Tam o'Shanter, Souter Johnny, and the characters from *The Jolly Beggars*, into scenes alongside Burns and his contemporaries, without any apparent appreciation for taking theatrical license, also recurs regularly, even in a few dramas that are otherwise sophisticated. If, for example, a play about Samuel Beckett written strictly as an historical or biographical drama showed his family and friends in Ireland engaged in scenes with the characters Vladimir and Estragon from *Waiting for Godot* without awareness of such incongruity, the dissociation would be glaring.

While all of these plays, as has been stated, are inherently fictions, some vouched for by their authors as historical, biographical, or in some way true to life actually contain fantastical elements. One head-scratcher is Edward Winslow Gilliam's 1914 melodrama *Robert Burns* in which the playwright engages classical comic devices, drawing incidents in which Burns dresses in women's clothes and later plays dead, both times to evade pursuers. Prefacing his highly detailed critique of *The True Pathos* by W. B. de Bear Nicol for the *Burns Chronicle*, George Humphrey wrote that biographical plays "may spring from a desire to celebrate the dead; but all too often the personality of the playwright becomes the principal theme."⁷

In press statements, author's notes, and interviews, many of these playwrights, especially prior to 1970, state their intent to present a true portrait of Burns that cuts through the mythology and hero worship to tell the story of the *real* Burns. Yet the theatrical Burns is *de facto* more artificial, far more of a subjective creation in these biographical fictions than he is in biography. In addition, the many Burns plays which espouse sentimental notions of virtue in Scottish identity or in Burns, can also be

⁶ With this, cf. the tongue-in-cheek film scene about Johann Strauss in *The Great Waltz* (1938), when Fernand Gravey as Strauss is riding through the woods with his consort, listening to the sounds of the horses, the carriage, the birds, the coachman, and a shepherd's pipe, and within a few minutes composes his waltz "Tales of the Vienna Woods."

⁷ George Humphrey, "Burns on the Stage: A Review of 'The True Pathos'," *Burns Chronicle*, 3rd ser., 1 (1952): 45-53 (45).

placed in the Kailyard. This, of course, created its own counter-ambitions. Representative of the pattern of playwrights declaring their plays to be true to life, i.e. implicitly the “real Burns,” was the announcement in 1931 that John Ressich had written a play about Burns “entirely based on facts.” Ressich’s script is thus far not extant but his comments to an interviewer could stand for many other playwrights:

I have been playing with the idea of a strictly historically-accurate play about Burns since 1922.... I believe that many of the statements made about Burns are very wrong. The public have no clear idea what Burns stood for.⁸

A case can be made that Joe Corrie’s full-length play, *Robert Burns* (1936), is the first modern drama on Burns’s life, because it offers some of Corrie’s contemporary polemics in metaphor, via the eighteenth century. The first self-identified exception to the tendency toward strictly historical narratives was by Robert Kemp, who described *The Other Dear Charmer* (1951) thematically as “a play about a human being [Agnes McLehose] yielding to the mirage of love for which she had not the capacity, and in the end finding only the parched sands where the mirage had soared.”⁹ Some of the subsequent plays and musicals, while maintaining a focus on biography or entertainment, also go deeper, deliberately creating meaning beyond the plot: *There Was A Man, Rabbie Burns Slept Here, Rab the Rhymer* (1951), *Three Goose Quills and a Knife, Comin’ Thru the Rye, A Drunk Man Looks At Robert Burns, Till All the Seas Run Dry, Rabbie: Scotland’s Superstar, The Witching Voice, Love But Her, Mice & Women, Ready Aye Ready, CauseWay, The Ghaist, The Lassies, O, Armour: A Herstory of the Scottish Bard, Good Morning Mr. Burns*, and others. These plays are also more often invested with dramatic opposition, subtext, role reversals, dramatic irony, and ambiguity, as well as theatrical and non-literary devices that enhance their complexity.

One of the potential attractions of seeing a play about Burns is the opportunity to be in the presence of a powerful and influential figure who died in another century. No matter how successful a playwright’s script may be, or how literary, it remains a blueprint for the experience of a live production, which means that design elements, direction, acting, and audience expectations all affect how a story is told and received. How far can a living biography go? Because of the inconsistencies in the rendering of Burns among the portraits made during his life by Taylor, Nasmyth, and Reid, the appearance of Burns as a stage character has been primarily influenced by one image, the Nasmyth bust-portrait. As engraved by

⁸ *Daily Record* [Glasgow] (10 September, 1931), 8.

⁹ Robert Kemp, *The Other Dear Charmer* (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1985), 10.

Beugo and altered through seemingly endless repetition, Burns's image in frontispieces and other illustrations is frequently a watered down or sketchy version of the Nasmyth.¹⁰ In spite of attempts to render Burns with greater humanity in statuary and sculpture, what he actually looked like remains unknown. The printed face of Burns often has the effect of a carelessly-reproduced two-dimensional logo. Until a fuller, more human Burns appears, he still has the potential to be discovered as an embodied, full character on stage or in film. How did Burns speak? What did his voice sound like? How did he walk? Move? What expressions, intelligence, or emotion could be seen in those eyes described so vividly by Sir Walter Scott? No one knows. Biographers can speculate. Burns's role as a Scottish icon make these questions more essential than they are for most poets and are intensified by his oversized status as a romantic figure whose popularity spans class, race, education, gender, religion, politics, and nationality. Do we need to know what the poets Byron or Keats sounded like? If so, apparently not as urgently.

So great has been the desire to answer these questions, anthropologist Caroline Wilkinson, Professor of Craniofacial Identification, and her colleagues at the University of Dundee LJMU Face Lab recreated the poet's facial features as a three-dimensional model using a cast of his skull, contemporary portraits, and state-of-the-art techniques. Unveiled in 2013, the model was animated in 2018 by Professor Wilkinson using D14D's Facial Motion Capture System, in collaboration with the poet Rab Wilson.¹¹ The results are fascinating but ultimately unsatisfying, about as human as the logo, sending us back to the portraits that muddied the water in the first place. Can an embodied Burns ever intersect with or surpass the Burns of our imaginations?

The successful manifestation of Burns on stage is not solely about external qualities, though they are important: it's about the physicality, energy, and presence an actor brings to the theater. In Scotland, the closest anyone has come to breathing life into Burns on stage so as to change his image in the popular imagination is John Cairney. As Donny O'Rourke observed, John Cairney was "Rabbie's representative on earth, eradicating

¹⁰ Basil C. Skinner, *Burns: Authentic Likenesses*, revised by James A. Mackay, (Ayr: Alloway Publishing, 1990). For other proposed likenesses, see the John Kay engraving, in Sheila Szatkowski, "The Papparazo, the Publisher, and the Poet," in Johnny Rodger and Gerard Carruthers, eds, *Fickle Man: Robert Burns in the 21st Century* (Dingwall: Sandstone, 2009): 38-49; the Francis Grose pencil sketches, in Patrick Scott, "Burns, Blacklock and Francis Grose: Three Sketches at Auction," *Burns Chronicle*, 129 (2020): 4-9.

¹¹ <http://app.dundee.ac.uk/pressreleases/2013/january13/robertburns.htm>; <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/news/2018/new-animation-brings-robert-burns-back-to-life.php>

the Nasmyth and other portraits with a single toss of his pony-tailed head.”¹² Yet Cairney’s stage portrayal was generational, naturally inhibited over time as he has aged, and so his stage Burns didn’t survive into the twenty-first century. Cinematic interpretations of Burns to date have been few and unsuccessful, artistically and commercially. Until someone does for Burns what Mel Gibson did for William Wallace, Ben Kingsley did for Gandhi, or Daniel Day Lewis did for Lincoln, theatrically and cinematically speaking Burns is still up for grabs.

When considering these dramatic interpretations created over a span of more than 175 years, the question of ownership comes into play: if the boundaries of biography are going to be broken by bringing Burns to life on stage, who gets to decide which Burns we will meet when the lights come up? Especially in Scotland, Burns Night Suppers or Burns events that can be described as ethnically non-European, non-male, non-Christian, or LGBT are commonly identified as “alternative.” The fact that Burns has been defined most often by white, heterosexual men is quite understandable, but now belies the reality of global demographics relative to his influence. The expansion of this standard is reflected in the escalation and reach of international Burns scholarship, Burns societies, Burns Night Suppers, and all manner of popular and creative responses to Burns.¹³

One such reconsideration was Diane Torr’s 1992 *Ready Aye Ready (a standing cock has nae conscience)*—a play centered around material from *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*—in which Torr played the main character, a man named Hamish McAlastair from Dumfries, in full drag without wink or comment, backed up by four male dancers in obvious, kitschy female tartan drag, a piper, and a fiddler. By introducing layers of artificiality and gender switching when investigating Burns’s proletarian leanings and bawdy poetry, Torr not only claimed ownership of Burns and his work but also of his forthright sexuality and Scottishness. Her performative assertions became part of how the narrative was experienced by her audience. As recently as 2008, at an LGBT Burns Night Supper in New York City, Scottish crime novelist Val McDermid’s *Immortal Memory* was primarily a discourse on why Burns belonged to her and to the community in attendance just as well as to anyone else.

¹² Donny O’Rourke “Supperman: Televising Burns,” in Kenneth Simpson, ed., *Burns Now* (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994), 120.

¹³ Lauren Brancz-McCartan, “The Twenty-first-century Burns Supper—a constantly evolving tradition?,” *Burns Chronicle*, 130.2 (2021): 149-173; Clark McGinn, *The Burns Supper: A Concise History* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Ltd., 2018), 144-150, 242-258; <https://burnsc21.glasgow.ac.uk/supper-map/>.

The first of these plays in which Burns does not appear as a character is Donald Mackenzie's 1956 comedy *Rabbie Burns Slept Here*, which is driven by a metaphor about the commercialization of national identity. Beginning in 1967, a surge of plays and musicals about Burns by women, at least twenty, began to appear, many told from women's points of view, a dozen of them leaving out the character of Burns entirely. The absence of Burns has the effect of furthering the audience's responsibility to synthesize the narrative, refining the Burns of their imaginations. It is also an act of reclamation that recasts focus on the women in his life or on contemporary female perspectives, and that can change how Burns is defined. Whether or not these shifts in point of view can fairly be deemed to arise from identity politics most often lies in the identity of the beholder.

Issues of infidelity and alcoholism have appeared in plays about Burns since 1878, with responses in the press to these behaviors ranging from the exculpatory "boys will be boys," to reflections about the relationship of morality to creativity, to no comment at all. More recently, the lens through which these plays are viewed has altered such that when appraising particular enactments of Burns's relationships with women, theater critics and audience members have begun introducing twenty-first-century terms such as "sexual predator" and "domestic abuse."¹⁴

The dramatists who have written the most Burns plays are Joe Corrie and John Cairney. Actor, author, and famous interpreter of Burns on the stage, Cairney is represented here by four plays, *The Robert Burns Story*, *A Drunk Man Looks at Robert Burns*, *The Boyhood of Burns*, and *Scot Free!*, though he has written and performed another seven Burn-related texts that fall more accurately within the categories of readings, lectures, adaptations, and concerts.¹⁵ Cairney's dynamic stage interpretation of Burns caught the public's imagination when he first appeared in Tom Wright's solo play *There Was a Man* in 1965. Performances in Scotland preceded a West End run in London in 1968, followed by years of touring Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States in his own one-man Burns play, *The Robert Burns Story*. Cairney also appeared as Burns in two televised versions of *There Was a Man* on BBC-1, starred in and wrote all six episodes of a dramatic series on Burns for STV in 1968, played Burns again in *Bonnie Jean* for ITV in 1969, starred as Burns in a television production of *The Robert Burns Story*, and appeared as himself in more

¹⁴ Gareth K, "Ae Fond Dramaturgy," *Vile Blog* (11 February, 2018); "Love But Her," *View From the Stalls*, viewfromthestalls.co.uk (20 August, 2018); Carlton Brick, "Poet, Fornicator and Rebel," spiked-online.com (10 February, 2021).

¹⁵ Cairney's other Burns-related theater texts are *The Holy Fair*, *The Lingerin Star*, *The Thomson Letters*, *The Clarinda Correspondence*, *As Others Saw Him*, *Burnspeak*, and *A Toast to the Lassies*.

than half a dozen Burns Night TV specials. Though he developed one-man stage shows about other Scots (Robert W. Service, Charles Rennie McIntosh, William McGonagall, and Robert Louis Stevenson), Cairney's particular dedication to promoting the life and works of Burns in performance remains unparalleled.

Joe Corrie started his working life as a miner in Fife at age fourteen. When he was twenty-four, a friend encouraged him to start writing. Within a few years he gained notoriety as a labor activist and an author of poetry, drama, and prose. His most famous play, the powerful *In Time o' Strife*, caught the attention of the nation after being performed in 1929, and the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, wrote a foreword to the published script. T. S. Eliot said of Corrie's first book of poetry, "Not since Burns has the voice of Scotland spoken with such authentic lyric note." Corrie is represented by six plays in this bibliography, four of which (those extant) reflect the radical and socialist leanings he felt he shared with Burns: the full-length *Robert Burns* and five one-acts, *The Rake o' Mauchline*, *A Man's A Man or Burns Amang the Gentry*, and *There Was a Lad*, plus *Clarinda*, and *Robert Burns and His Highland Mary*. Corrie also wrote a popular radio adaptation of "Tam o'Shanter" that was performed and broadcast repeatedly for over forty years, as well as at least half a dozen other radio programs about Burns. Corrie's extensive interest in Burns leaves open the possibility that other scripts, reviews, or production listings will surface. The total number of one-act plays he wrote is unknown, but easily exceeds ten dozen. Early in his career one critic lauded him as "Mr. Joe Corrie, the Robert Burns of the modern one-act play."¹⁶

Promising references to another dozen plays about Burns exist for which there is not yet enough information available to warrant giving them separate entries here. These include: a fragment of an unfinished play about Burns by French poet Alfred de Vigny, discovered after his death in 1863; an opera from 1898 depicting the life of Burns by Italian Michele d'Allesandro titled *Il Poeta*; a four-act drama by Captain Lennox Kendall about the young Robert Burns planned for the West End of London in 1912; *Bonnie Doon*, by an unnamed Scottish playwright, bound for the West End and Broadway in 1924 with Dallas Anderson in the lead; Glasgow author John Ressich's promised 1931 play *Robert Burns*; Forrest Rutherford's *Burns, the Ploughman*, headed to Broadway in 1936; New Zealander A. J. Sinclair's 1937 drama *A Scottish Pale*; a musical intended for Broadway in 1947, *The Life of Robert Burns*, with John Beal as Burns;

¹⁶ *The Guardian* (27 September, 1938), 5. For information, see <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/joe-corrie/>, especially Paul Malgrati's 2018 paper "Pit and Plough: Corrie's Burns": <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/joe-corrie/conferencepapers/pit-and-plough-corries-burns/> (since published in *Burns Chronicle*, 129 (2020): 96-102).

Burns and His Highland Mary, a four-act comedy drama performed in Aberdeen in 1959; *Burns! (Your Bard By the Way)* by Sian Ross, 1998; Barbara Beck's comedy *A Spirited Affair* performed in Liverpool in 1998; *Burns at Hame*, a play in two acts by Josephine Stuart; *The Candle Burns* by Archibald S. Jackson; and *The Lost Weekend of Robert Burns* by Robin Cairns. There were press reports in the 1940s that A. J. Cronin was writing a Burns play, and a flurry of newspaper items in the 1920s teasing that J.M. Barrie was also at work on a play about Burns. Whether or not the latter assertion originated with Barrie, he finally quashed the rumor himself. If Barrie or Cronin, or other established Scottish playwrights such as James Bridie, Ena Lamont Stewart, Robert McLellan, Liz Lochhead, or John Byrne, had taken a crack at bringing Burns to life on the stage, our current understanding of Burns might be that much richer. The chances are good that some of the playwrights who take up the challenge of embodying Burns on stage in the future will forge a Burns who is more human, surprising, and complex.

As Gerard Carruthers has observed, Burns in his afterlife has inspired creative responses to his life and work by artists from dramatically different backgrounds, disciplines, and aesthetics.¹⁷ In the case of the authors and composers listed here, they range from amateurs to commercial playwrights and from classical composers to pop song writers. Researching the artists and their creations, I was surprised by the sheer number of plays and the breadth of originality; it has confirmed my belief that this bibliography, though thorough, will not prove to be exhaustive.

* * *

What constitutes a stage play, musical, or opera has changed during the years from 1842 to 2019 and is dependent upon evolving practices in the theater, as well as the context of country or culture. The magnitude and variety of creative responses to Burns have helped to define parameters for what to include in this bibliography. My principal sources were, whenever available, published texts, typescripts, reviews, press descriptions and listings, interviews, correspondence, videos, photographs, recordings, and information about the author(s) background and intent. Whether or not a play has yet been performed was not a determining factor for inclusion, as long as it was written to be performed. Neither have I made any distinction between amateur and professional writing or productions. The bulk of works that are neither musicals nor operas could rightly be called "plays with music," as most of the playwrights incorporate Burns songs within the

¹⁷ *My Life With Robert Burns Video Podcast*, Episode 48 (New Cumnock Burns Club, 30 May, 2021).

narrative or add them for entertainment value. Not included are performance events or dramatic works considered strictly to be lectures, staged readings, personal reminiscences, speeches, musical concerts or recitals, texts for Burns impersonators or reenactors, sketch comedy, poetry, spoken word, dance, children's theater, radio, television, or film scripts, tableau vivant, art or museum installations, improvisation, cabaret, stand-up comedy, toasts, tributes, storytelling, variety acts, burlesque, pantomimes, pageants, parades, or spectacles—all of which are well documented by multiple examples with content about Burns. The bibliography is focused on plays about Burns and his influence, not stage adaptations of his work. Productions of Burns's cantata *Love and Liberty* (referred to as *The Jolly Beggars* throughout), is not a part of this bibliography, nor are theatrical adaptations of poems by Burns such as "Tam o'Shanter," "The Holy Fair," "The Cotter's Saturday Night," etc.

Whenever it has been possible to determine the style of a play through scripts or contemporary reviews, that style is identified. The year given for each entry is based either on the first production, first publication, copyright date, or in some cases date of composition or an author's note. While I have endeavored to identify the place and date of any theatrical premieres, when only "Staged:" appears in an entry it means the data that follows is the earliest production information available. For a few of the musicals the only known publication is an LP or CD of songs, which is then cited in the bibliographical entry.

Published guides introducing this topic include: John Cairney, *Burnscripts* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011); John Cairney, "My Life as Rabbie," *The Herald* [Glasgow], 19 July 1996; the essays in Ian Brown and Gerard Carruthers, eds, *Performing Robert Burns: Enactments and Representations of the 'National Bard'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021); and Mary Brennan, "Burns: The Punk Rock Poet," *The Herald* [Glasgow], 23 January, 2006.

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**The Bibliography:
Robert Burns's Life on the Stage, 1842-2019**

1842

Mark Lemon (1809-1870), *Robert Burns, A Drama*.

Originally staged: New Strand Theatre, London, 28 March, 1842.
Published: in *A Selection of New & Popular Dramas and Farces* (London: William Barth, 1844).

Music selected and arranged by James Dewar. The author was co-founder of the magazine *Punch*. Reviews of the original London production refer to this melodrama as a burletta, i.e. "little opera." A revival at the Adelphi Theatre, Edinburgh 14 August, 1844, was one of several events surrounding the Burns celebration held that year on the banks of the Doon in Alloway. The structure of the play was a series of unconnected scenes from Burns's life, interspersed with fictional characters such as Sir Harry Modely, Tam o'Shanter, Souter Johnny, and Spirit of Scotland. A commentator for *The Caledonian Mercury* described the play as "so paltry, not to say unmeaning, that we are astonished at its frequent repetition."¹⁸

1858

W.G. Wills (1828-1891), *The Man o' Airlie, A Drama of the Affections*.

Originally staged: 20 July, 1867, Princess Theatre, London. Not printed.

Written in preparation for the Burns centennial celebrations of 1859, the plot of this melodrama was inspired by the German play *Laurel and Beggars' Staff* by Carl von Holtei, though only one scene in Irish playwright Wills's version was recognizable from the original. The allegory at the heart of *The Man o' Airlie*, of a poor Scottish farmer trying to raise money to publish a book of his poems who comes finally to ruin, was not lost on audiences or critics, especially because the actor who played the lead (Hermann Vezin) was costumed to resemble well-known portraits of Burns. One critic observed, "Needless to say there is not a grain of Burns in [the play] . . . Nevertheless, the audience will have it that [the main character] is Burns." Though many of the London critics complained about the unintelligibility of the Scottish accents, the play was commercially successful, later opened on 5 June, 1871 at the Booth

¹⁸ *Morning Advertiser* [London] (29 March, 1842), 3; James A. Mackay, *Burnsiana* (Ayrshire: Alloway Publishing, 1988), 88; *Caledonian Mercury* (19 Aug. 1844), 2.

Theatre in New York, and was periodically revived on both sides of the Atlantic for over fifty years.¹⁹

1878

J. F. Duncan (1851-1924), *Lights and Shadows, or, Episodes in the Life of Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Thistle Hall, Dundee, 25 January, 1878. Published: Dundee: J. P. Matthew & Co., 1879.

A Dramatic Sketch. The author of this “entertainment” was a member of the Dundee Burns Club. Described as “an imitation of Ramsay’s *Gentle Shepard*” and written in rhymed verse, the play was staged several times over the years by the Club, often at the Theatre Royal, for Burns festivals, various charities, and as a fundraiser for the Dundee Burns Statue Fund.²⁰

James Hutchison Stirling (1820-1909), *Burns in Drama*.

Published: in *Burns in Drama, together with Saved Leaves* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Company, 1878).

Described by literary critics as “a powerful piece of writing” and “written with considerable force and spirit,” those critics were equally baffled as to how this “collection of scenes” from Burns’s life, in five acts, constituted a drama when it did not have a traditional plot. Yet, the published text is comparable to other presentational, neo-classic plays of the time period. Whether or not it was ever produced has yet to be determined.²¹

1896

Anon., *Robert Burns, An Ideal Romance, in Three Acts*.

Originally staged: Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, 25 May, 1896. Not printed.

Music arranged by E. T. De Banzie, produced by Mr. Matthew Brodie. The damning reviews of this play may be more entertaining than the production was. “A continuous carnival of drink” that “is an outrage” and “the most pitiful exhibition seen in Edinburgh for many years,” scenes with fictional and historical characters are played out at the Tam o’Shanter Inn, Glencairn House, Lady Carlton’s home, a banquet hall in Edinburgh, Katie Watson’s inn, and the banks of the Nith. Addressing the anonymity of the

¹⁹ *The Examiner* [London], (10 August, 1867), 7; *The Sun* [London], (22 July, 1867), 6; *Pall Mall Gazette* (22 July, 1867), 10; *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald* (7 September, 1867), 3.

²⁰ *Courier and Argus* [Dundee] (26 January, 1878), 2, (11 April, 1879), 2; *Dundee Courier* (19 October, 1880), 3, (14 January, 1920), 3.

²¹ *Liverpool Mercury* (9 April, 1878), 6; *The Examiner* [London] (13 April, 1878), 467.

author, another critic contended, “After witnessing [the play] one is not surprised that the author prefers to conceal his identity.” The idea for the play was suggested by H. Chance Newton, the unidentified author was a journalist on the staff of *The Scotsman*, and the opening performance of the play was “under Masonic and Burns Club patronage,” with members of Canongate Kilwinning Lodge marching to the theatre that night.²²

1902

James Garrow, *Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: The Kingston Company at Town Hall, Whitburn, West Lothian, 9 December, 1902. Not printed.

Produced by A.W.B. Kingston. “This play deals with several thrilling incidents in the life of our national poet,” including his birth, scenes from his writing life, and comic scenes with Tam o’Shanter and Souter Johnny. A comic melodrama, often billed as a “romantic Scottish drama” or “comedy drama,” it had a run at the Empire Theatre, Dundee in 1903 and continued to be performed throughout Scotland 1904-1914, and as late as 1927, often under the title *Rantin’ Rovin’ Robin*.²³

1903

Clayton Mackenzie Legge (1874-1931), *Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: The Nesbitt, Wilkes-Barre, “Pennsylvania, 1 October, 1903. Typescript: Ellis Library, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1903, Copyright deposits, 1901-1944, reel no. 77, 143 pp.

American actor and playwright Legge (a direct lineal descendent of Henry Mackenzie) wrote this “romantic drama” as a starring vehicle for himself. While it was a modest success on a tour of the eastern United States and Canada, it opened and closed on Broadway at the Carnegie Lyceum 28 January, 1905. Legge had a successful career as an actor in stock companies, published a well-received novel about Burns in 1907, *Highland Mary*, and then left the theater to become an Episcopalian minister.²⁴

²² *Edinburgh Evening News* (26 May, 1896), 2; *The Era* [London] (30 May, 1896), 11; *Glasgow Herald* (2 June, 1896), 4.

²³ *West Lothian Courier* (12 December, 1902), 8; *Dundee Evening Post* (9 June 1903), 5; *Dundee Courier* (9 June, 1903), 5.

²⁴ *The Washington Times* [District of Columbia], (20 August, 1903), 13; *Pittston Gazette* [Pennsylvania] (29 September, 1903), 6; *The Oregon Daily Journal*, (4 August, 1907), 47; <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/robert-burns-6020>.

1905

Paul M. Potter (1853-1921), *Nancy Stair*.

Originally staged: Criterion Theatre, New York City, 15 March, 1905. Not printed.

English actress Mary Mannering (a student of Hermann Veizin who had played the lead in *The Man o' Airlie*) received glowing reviews for her performance as the title character in this stage adaptation of the popular romance novel by Elinor MacCartney Lane (1864-1909) about a young woman's chaste affairs with three rivals, one of whom was Robert Burns; according to reviewers, Burns played a more prominent role in this adaptation. American author Lane was coy about her implication that the fictional character of Nancy Stair was actually historical. Criticized for poor construction and dull writing, *Nancy Stair* closed in just over a month. The English-born Potter had nineteen plays produced in London and New York.²⁵

1910

George Reston Malloch (1875-1953), *A Nicht Wi' Burns*.

Originally staged: Edinburgh Lyceum Theatre, 25 July, 1910. Not printed.

This one-act play was also produced in August of 1910 at The King's Theatre, Glasgow, followed by a small tour in Scotland. Malloch, who was from Paisley, went on to become a successful poet and playwright. Hugh MacDiarmid was a friend and an advocate for Malloch's poetry.²⁶

1911

George Eyre-Todd (1862-1937), *The Angel of Robert Burns, A Play in Four Scenes*.

Originally staged: Scottish National Exhibition of History, Art, and Industry, Glasgow, 1911. Published: Glasgow: Scottish Country Life Limited, 1916.

After real-life personalities such as Burns, Gavin Hamilton, John Wilson, William Fisher, Poosie Nancie, the Duchess of Gordon, David Hume, Robert Fergusson, Walter Scott, and others engage with the characters from Burns's *The Jolly Beggars*, this short play culminates in a scene wherein the dying Burns and his wife Jean Armour are visited by Jean Lorimer and Maria Riddell. Though identified as a "pageant play" "showing the poet as he lived," the structure is closer to a fantasy pastiche

²⁵ *Brooklyn Times Union*, (17 March, 1906), 5; *Coshocton Daily Age* [Ohio] (25 March, 1905), 14; *The Era* [London] (1 April, 1905), 5; *The Stage* [London] (10 March, 1921), 17; <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/nancy-stair-6044#ProductionStaff>.

²⁶ *The Referee* [Scotland] (24 July 1910), 7; *Barrhead News* (12 August 1910), 10.

of brief romantic vignettes. While the original production was not well received, reviews of the published text were more appreciative of the play as well as the author, who was known as “The Scottish Thoreau.”²⁷

1914

Edward Winslow Gilliam (1834-1925), *Robert Burns, A Drama in Four Acts*.

Published: Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1914.

In his introduction to the script, American author Gilliam explains that his full-length play is going to avoid the “unhappy incidents in the life of the Bard” that had caused previous plays to fail, by ending with “a scene representative of the Bard’s world-wide triumph,” when Burns was hailed in Edinburgh. Gilliam emphasizes that his historical drama contains “Nothing artificial,” and that it depicts “a real life.” This assertion is in spite of the fact that the author concocted a plot to “entrap and imprison” Burns in Edinburgh, which the poet escapes twice, once by dressing as a woman and later by pretending to be dead. There are thus far no records of any plans to produce this play nor of any productions.²⁸

1915

Robert Machardy, *The Shade of Burns, A Dramatic Poem*.

Originally staged: Public Hall, Strathaven, 10 February, 1916. Published: Hamilton: The Hamilton Advertiser, Ltd., 1915.

A “champion of Scottish music” who introduced bagpipes as an orchestral instrument in 1888, Robert Machardy penned three plays as well as the music and librettos for nine operas. Though the published text of *The Shade of Burns* is identified as “A Dramatic Poem,” descriptions in the press called it a “Scottish Opera” or “A Grand Scottish Opera,” and as produced the production did contain Machardy’s arrangements of traditional tunes used by Burns. As published, the libretto is a presentational verse drama of rhymed couplets in a neo-classic style. The story involves “Ghost of Burns” returning “to earth to express his love of his native land and its national music,” and features the fictional characters of Jester, Lady Scotia Doon, Earl of Lugar, and Chieftain’s Daughter, plus three choruses.²⁹

²⁷ *Dumfries and Galloway Standard* (27 April 1914), 4; *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (27 January 1917), 2; *Falkirk Herald* (17 July, 1937), 10.

²⁸ *Evening Sun* [Baltimore] (18 January, 1919), 6; *The Pittsburgh Press* (25 January, 1919), 3; *Oakland Tribune* (7 September, 1919), 8.

²⁹ *Hamilton Advertiser* (5 February, 1916), 5, and (12 February, 1916), 15; *Glasgow Weekly Herald* (3 April, 1920).

1923

Catherine Chisolm Cushing (1874–1952), *Nancy Stair*.

Originally staged: The Majestic Theater, Los Angeles, 4 February, 1923.

Typescript: Performing Arts Research Collection, New York Public Library, *T-Mss 1966-002, 136 pp.

American playwright Cushing's adaptation of Elinor McCartney Lane's popular romance novel of the same name begins in 1923 with a prologue in which three young men begin to tell an ancestral tale from 1788. Though "Bobbie" Burns is referred to often in the play as one of three prospective suitors for Nancy, he appears only in one extended scene in the second act. At the end that scene in an Edinburgh pub, Nancy Stair is alarmed to discover "the maker of jeweled phrase should be so bestial . . . so sodden, so gross. Ugh!", which happens right after Jean Armour bursts into the pub to pull Bobbie off of her.³⁰

H. Fletcher Lee, *Robert Burns*.

Staged: Edinburgh Repertory Theatre, 19 December, 1932.

Published: London: Sands & Co., 1926.

A condensed historical enactment of Burns's adult life, beginning when Burns was twenty-five and highlighting his reception in Edinburgh and his working life in Dumfries, this full-length play was published and reviewed prior to any plans for a production. Robert Bains wrote in the *Burns Chronicle*, "[the play] does not bring us any nearer the secret of Burns than do the biographies from which Mrs. Lee has drawn much of her dialogue." The dialogue is primarily expository and among the forty-four characters are notably Betty Davidson, John Murdoch, and young Walter Scott, as well as the ensemble of characters from *The Jolly Beggars* in a scene at Poozie Nancie's tavern in Mauchline.³¹

1924

G. W. Shirley, *The Scotland of Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Lyceum Theatre, Dumfries, September 5, 1924. Not printed.

Structured as five episodes—three scenes from Burns's life and two reenactments, "Hallowe'en" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night"—the original production of this play was staged by the Dumfries Guild players for the delegates of the annual Burns Federation Conference, later revived, and performed twice in London. The first incarnation featured Burns's great-granddaughter, Jean Armour Burns Brown, as the mother in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and John Laurie (who later became a household

³⁰ *Los Angeles Times* (4 February, 1923), 65;

³¹ *Burns Chronicle* (1927), 153-54; *Winnipeg Tribune* (4 February, 1933), 17.

name in Scotland starring in the television show *Dad's Army*) as Burns in two other episodes. The author was a librarian in Dumfries for thirty-six years and for many years a researcher at the Dumfriesshire Antiquarian Society.³²

1925

John Drinkwater (1882-1937), *Robert Burns*.

Staged: Scottish Orpheus Choir at the Princess Theatre, Brisbane, Australia, 21 May, 1938. Published: Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925; London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1925.

Music composed by Frederick Austin. Hoping for a repeat of his 1918 success with the sentimental *Abraham Lincoln* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, this text was published before it was produced. Spanning Burns's life from "Handsome Nell" to his deathbed, the reviews of Drinkwater's newest historical drama were harsh—described by *The New York Times* as a random "succession of dramatic moments" that not a play but a "Burns Evening." *The Burns Chronicle* declared the character of Burns a "nonentity" that "breathes of drink, wantonness, and posturing," and called the play a "product of Sassenach imagination." The characters sing or recite, in whole or in part, forty-two Burns songs that are strung together with dialogue to create a loose narrative. Though the English Drinkwater—insurance clerk turned handy man, actor, poet, then playwright—had solid connections in the theater and there were press reports of an imminent production on the West End or Broadway, there is as yet no evidence that the play was ever staged in either the United Kingdom or the United States.³³

1926

Lewis Coumts, *The Tragic Comedy of Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Central Hall, Aberdeen, 2 April, 1926. Not printed.

Beginning with a scene on the Kirkoswald coast depicting Burns's smuggling experience, this play moves on to Burns's troubles with the Armours in Mauchline and facing the cutty stool in the kirk, then to Clarinda's drawing room in Edinburgh, and finally a depiction of Burns struggling with debt at Ellisland. The Aberdonian author played the role of Burns.³⁴

³² *Dundee Courier* (8 September, 1924), 4; *Burns Chronicle* 1925, 157; *Edinburgh Evening News* (19 August, 1939), 21.

³³ *Birmingham Daily Gazette* (16 December, 1923), 4; *New York Times* (13 December, 1925); *Burns Chronicle* (1926), 127-30, 140-41; *Baltimore Sun* (10 January, 1932), 98; *Daily News* [New York] (27 November, 1932), 183.

³⁴ *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (3 April, 1926), 7 and (5 April, 1926), 8.

Laurence Housman (1865-1969), *The Cutty Stool*.

Published: *Cornhill Magazine*, 60.355 (January 1926).

The English author Housman wrote over fifty plays, as well as fiction and verse. This one-act was also published in a volume of short plays by Housman, *Cornered Poets: A Book of Dramatic Dialogues*, Jonathan Cape (London: 1929), about literary figures Thomas Carlyle, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Thomas Gray, Ninon de Lanclose, John Donne, and Burns. *The Cutty Stool* concerns Burns's lack of repentance after being rebuked on the fornicator's bench for the Elizabeth Paton incident, while he sits in the kirk and debates God and the Devil with Andrew Paton.³⁵

1927

T. C. Fairbairn, *Robert Burns, An Opera*.

Originally staged: Scala Theatre, London, 26 July, 1927. Not printed.

This opera, with original music by Albert Edwards, is centered around scenes from the life of Burns. In 1947, plans were made for a tryout of this opera in Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa, to be followed by a run on Broadway. Neither the Canadian tryout nor the New York production was ever realized. In June 1947, the opera was produced with *corps de ballet*, choir, and orchestra at Butlin's Holiday Camp in Ayr. A member of the Burns Federation wrote that he was horrified when at the end of that production Burns got up from his death bed to sing "Bonnie Mary of Argyle."³⁶

1930

J. E. Middleton, *The Ayrshire Ploughman, A Ballad Opera*.

Originally staged: The Scottish Festival, Banff Spring Hotel, 30 August, 1930. Not printed.

Arrangements by Healy Willan, musical director Alfred Heather. This thirty-minute ballad opera comprised of Burns songs featured eight lead singers and a chorus who enacted episodes about Burns and his most famous love interests, all in one setting: a moonlit May night along the banks of river in Ayr. The same festival staged a successful production of *The Jolly Beggars* in 1928, which was revived in 1930.³⁷

³⁵ <http://www.philsp.com/homeville/fmi/n/n02120.htm>.

³⁶ *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (27 July, 1927), 6; *Scotsman* (1 August, 1927), 12; *Ottawa Journal* (20 August, 1947), 9; *Brechin Advertiser* (3 June, 1947), 6.

³⁷ *Winnipeg Tribune* (20 September, 1930), 6; *The Province* [Vancouver] (7 September, 1930), 12.

1932

Anne Burns and John Ashby Conway, *Robert Burns: An Historical Play in Six Episodes*.

Originally staged: University of Washington, Seattle, 1932. Published: Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1934.

This full-length play primarily concerns Burns's relationship with Jean Armour, touches upon his radicalism, and includes the characters from *The Jolly Beggars* singing their songs. Of note is a scene in which Burns is aghast to discover a friend is involved in the slave trade. Unlike nearly all the plays listed here, there is no use of Scots in the dialogue nor any attempt at a phonetic dialect. In 1963 the authors adapted their play for the radio. In 1956, they held a public staged reading of a new, one-woman play about Burns, *A Man's A Man*, at Town Hall in New York City.³⁸

1934

John E. Daniels, *Tam O'Shanter*

Originally staged: Scottish Musical Players at the Walker Theatre, Winnipeg, 13 March, 1934. Not printed.

This musical fantasy in two acts presented a world in which Burns was gathered with, and serenaded by, some of the most famous characters from his poems and songs, including Tam o'Shanter, Souter Johnny, Mary Morrison, and the randie, gangrel bodies from *The Jolly Beggars*, singing some of Burns most popular songs. The production was restaged in Victoria, British Columbia, in March 1935.³⁹

1936

Joe Corrie (1894-1968), *Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Newbattle Burns Dramatic Society, Newtongrange, 29 January, 1936. Published: Glasgow: Brown, Son, & Ferguson, Ltd., 1943; reprinted 1979.

The first of six plays about Burns by the celebrated miner and author from West Fife, this full-length drama deals with the poet's struggles at Mossgiel from 1784 to 1787, such as his conflict with the Kirk, decision to emigrate to Jamaica, success in Edinburgh, and relationship with Jean Armour. Produced many times in the twentieth-century: for a 1959 revival at the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow, the play was retitled *The Roving Boy*, in 1960 Corrie rewrote it as *There Was A Lad*. In 1986 the original title and text were used for a revival directed by David Hayman for the Scottish

³⁸ *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 36.12 (New York: December 1932) 1026;

³⁹ *Winnipeg Tribune* (8 March, 1934), 4, and (10 March, 1934), 20; *Victoria Daily Times* (23 March, 1935), 20.

Theatre Company, described by one reviewer as having a parody of a Burns Supper as a curtain-raiser that is not in the Corrie script.⁴⁰

1938

Joe Corrie, *The Rake o' Mauchline, A Play in One Act*.

Originally staged: Barrhead Players, Paisley, 16 February, 1938.

Published: Scottish Plays, no. 99, Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, Ltd., 1938.

This play begins when Adam Armour sends law officers after Rab Mossgiel who seeks refuge in Kilmarnock with his friend Tam Sampson and Tam's wife. They are paid a late-night visit by printer John Wilson, and Burns plans his escape to the West Indies.⁴¹

John C. Darlison, *A Mauchline Foregathering, A Musical and Dramatic Interlude*.

Originally staged: November 1938 in Dumfries. Published: Dumfries: R. Dinwiddie, n.d.

Staged at Burns Night events in the 1940s and '50s in Scotland, this one-act portrays a convivial gathering in Nanse Tinnock's Mauchline hostelry among Burns, Gavin Hamilton, John Rankine, and Nanse Tinnock with fictional characters including Tam o'Shanter, Kate Shanter, Soutar Johnnie, and "The Frail Vessel."⁴²

1948

Hugh Abercrombie (1890-1965), *Auld Lang Syne, A Musical Play*.

Originally staged: St. Louis Municipal Opera, Forest Park, 3 June, 1948.

Typescript: Performing Arts Research Collections, New York Public Library, RM 4385, 77 pp.

Advance press for *Auld Lang Syne* reflected Canadian-born producer John Murray Anderson's desire to take this stage biography of Burns directly to Broadway, eventually to London. The playwright was Anderson's brother, Hugh A. Anderson, also Canadian, who went by the pen name of Hugh Abercrombie. Original music interspersed with traditional Scottish tunes was by Broadway composer and songwriter Henry Sullivan (1895-1975), though most of the lyrics were by Burns. 7500 people attended opening night in an outdoor amphitheater that fits 12,000. The author wrote in his foreword that the play "does not set out to be a profound biography of the Poet, but is rather a Tapestry of Music."

⁴⁰ *Dalkeith Advertiser* (6 February, 1946), 2; *The Stage* [London] (12 February, 1959), 13, and (29 May, 1986), 22.

⁴¹ *The Scotsman* (21 February, 1938), 7;

⁴² *Burns Chronicle* (1939), 167.

Though the play suffered under the weight of thirty-three musical numbers and a weak book, critics agreed that Brian Sullivan as Burns and a “ghosts and goblins” ballet, “Tam o’Shanter’s Mare,” were the strongest elements. This musical did not transfer to New York and was not revived.⁴³

Warren P. Munsell, Jr. (1915-1952), *Comin’ Thro the Rye*.

Originally staged: Berkshire Festival Theatre, Massachusetts, 5 July, 1948. Typescript: Theatre Guild Archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale, MSS 436, Series III, 119 pp.

Munsell’s play with music about Burns’s “unspoiled period” while he was still a farmer incorporated well-known Burns songs. Munsell was the son of the long-time Business Manager of the prestigious Theater Guild in New York and died suddenly at the age of 36 on July 28, 1952. Prior to Munsell’s death there were announcements that the play would be revived at the Olney Theatre outside of Baltimore, August 1952, to be followed by a Broadway run in March 1953 produced by the Theatre Guild, starring David Brook (who had appeared on Broadway in *Brigadoon*) and directed by Margaret Webster. The Theatre Guild revived it again with the intention of going to Broadway, at the Westport Country Playhouse in Connecticut August 1953, with revisions by Stephen DeBaun. In spite of the power of the Theatre Guild and strong professional reviews for all three productions, the New York run never materialized.⁴⁴

1950

Joe Corrie, *A Man’s A Man, or Burns Among the Gentry*.

Staged: The Empire Theatre, Glasgow, 1950. Typescript: National Library of Scotland, Archives and Manuscripts, MSS.26493, 9 pp.

This one-act depicts a scene between Jock Fairley, played by Jack Radcliffe, and Burns, played by Robert Wilson.⁴⁵

Joe Corrie, *Clarinda*.

Staged: Included in a variety show in Kirkcaldy staged by Robert Wilson.
Not printed.

The White Heather Group took a tour of this one-act “playlet” to the U.S. and Canada in 1960.⁴⁶

⁴³ *St. Louis Globe Democrat* (26 May, 1948), 22; *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (4 June, 1948), 3; *St. Louis Star* (4 June, 1948), 21.

⁴⁴ *Berkshire Evening Eagle* (6 July, 1948), 6; *Evening Sun* [Baltimore] (21 August, 1952), 16; ; *Variety* (27 August, 1952), 58, 60; *Windsor Star* (19 September, 1953), 17; Westport Country Playhouse program, Connecticut, 1953.

⁴⁵ *The Stage* [London] (19 January, 1950), 13;

⁴⁶ *The Stage* [London] (3 March, 1960), 21;

Joe Corrie, *Robert Burns and His Highland Mary*.

Staged: Miner's Drama Festival, Armadale, West Lothian, 16 March, 1950. Not printed.

This one-act play won third prize at the Miner's Drama Festival.⁴⁷

Isabel S. Pithie, *Yon Lad Burns*.

Staged: Loudon Montgomery Parents-Teachers Association, Irvine, 7 December, 1955. Published: Galashiels: privately printed, 1950.

There are newspaper accounts of a sketch with the same title being performed at Burns Suppers on Orkney in 1948 and in Dundee in 1949, though no author is credited.⁴⁸

1951

Robert Kemp (1908-1967), *The Other Dear Charmer, A Comedy in Three Acts*.

Originally staged: The Glasgow Citizens' Theatre at the Gaiety Theatre Ayr, 19 December, 1951. Published: London: Duckworth, 1957; Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, Ltd., 1985.

This play is focused on the relationship between Agnes McLehose (Clarinda) and Burns, but the author stated that the central subject is "Clarinda," and "the importance of Burns in this play is only his importance to her." The dialogue contains barely a trace of Scots. The original production moved to Glasgow where it received positive reviews. It was staged at the Edinburgh Festival a few years later and eventually produced all over the United Kingdom. Twice filmed for television—a 30-minute version in 1953 and a 90-minute version 1959—Tom Fleming starred as Burns both times, and there were also radio adaptations. The title comes from a line in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, "How happy could I be with either, / Were t'other dear charmer away."⁴⁹

W. Bernard de Bear Nicol, *The True Pathos*.

Originally staged: St. Mary's Hall, Dumfries, 23 June, 1951. Not printed.

Set in Dumfries during the last six years of Burns's life, de Bear Nicol's play places particular emphasis on the poet's more radical political beliefs and his death. Adapted for the radio by Alexander Allen, it aired in Scotland 25 January, 1955. The title comes from the ninth stanza

⁴⁷ *West Lothian Courier* (24 March, 1950), 6.

⁴⁸ *Irvine Herald* (9 December, 1955), 2; John Cairney, *Burnscripts*, Luath Press Limited (Edinburgh: 2011), 258.

⁴⁹ *The Stage* [London] (6 December, 1951), 10; *The Guardian* (27 August, 1954), 5; <https://www.imdb.com/title/>

of Burns's "Epistle to Dr. Blacklock": "To make a happy fire-side clime/
To weans and wife,/ That's the true pathos and sublime/ Of human life."⁵⁰

1952

Clay Boland, Jr. and Mary Boland, *Green Grow the Rashes*.

No production found. Not printed.

Book by Mary and Clay Boland, Jr., words and music by Mr. Boland. A child prodigy who began composing at the age of six, Boland became a music teacher and wrote children's musicals. In a 2010 interview, he said that in the 1960s he was approached by a Broadway producer to write the music for a play about Burns, but he declined because the script "focused on the more bawdy side of one of my favorite poets." All the material for *Green Grow the Rashes* was copyrighted in 1963 and 1964, though no record of a production has been found.⁵¹

1953

Eric Crozier (1914-1994). *Rab the Rhymer, A Play in Three Acts*.

Originally staged: The Saltire Society at Adam Smith Hall, Kircaldy, 7 July, 1953. Published: London: J. Garnet Miller Ltd., 1953.

Librettist, producer, and stage director Eric Crozier is known for his librettos for Benjamin Britten's compositions such as *Albert Herring*, *Let's Make an Opera*, and *St. Nicholas*, as well as his collaboration with E. M. Forster on *Billy Budd*. Crozier focused on the "most vital creative period" of Burns's life, the spring and summer of 1786 at Mossgiel, using Burns's own lyrics with traditional tunes. Crozier wrote this play, often referred to as "a folk opera," for his friend Hans Oppenheim, founder and director of the Saltire Singers, with the intention of introducing the public to lesser-known lyrics by Burns.⁵²

Jerome Lawrence (1915-2004) and Robert E. Lee (1918-1994), *Annie Laurie: A Story of Robert Burns*.

Staged: Lanier High School Glee Club, Montgomery Alabama, 14 February, 1953. Published: New York: Harms, Inc., 1954.

This one-act musical, musiplay, or operetta, as it is variously described, premiered in a radio version 2 April, 1951 on NBC, starring Gordon MacRae. Americans Lawrence and Lee—collaborators on thirty-nine

⁵⁰ *Scotsman* (25 December, 1950), 3; *Burns Chronicle*, 1952, 45-53; *Fifeshire Advertiser* (22 January, 1955), 3.

⁵¹ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (10 November, 1967), 30; *Waco Citizen* (4 November, 1971), 5; *Sopris Sun* [Colorado] (18 March, 2010).

⁵² *Fife Free Press* (20 June, 1953), 2; *Burns Chronicle*, 1954, 44-47, and 1955, 74-76; *Fifeshire Advertiser* (11 July, 1953), 3.

plays, most famously *Inherit the Wind* and *Auntie Mame*—expanded it into a stage version “especially suited to junior high school age students” and it continues to be performed. The authors chose a popular Scottish song unrelated to Burns for the spurious title as a hook and, though they used three Burns songs plus a Burns medley, the focus is on a more generically Scottish musical narrative with the inclusion of “Annie Laurie,” “Wi’ a Hundred Pipers,” “Loch Lomond,” and “Scotch-Type Love.” The last of these, the only original song, relies on the stereotypical aspersion that Scots are stingy. A note in the script explains that the play is an educational tool “based on the essential facts of Robert Burns’s life,” while the script consistently provides misinformation and kitsch, in a style reminiscent of *Brigadoon*. The authors’ advice to the adolescents who they anticipated would perform the play includes guidance on scenery, singing and acting, Scottish accent, and detailed character interpretations. Although the character of Jean Armour is initially jealous of Annie Laurie, she discovers there is no such person—it turns out Annie Laurie is a metaphor, “the dream of perfection in every laddie’s eye.”⁵³

1954

Walter Sutherland, *Clarinda*.

Originally staged: The Launceston Players at the Tasmanian Drama Festival, 24 May, 1954. Not printed.

This short play is about a visit between “Sylvander and Clarinda” in Edinburgh. The author was a local librarian who wrote several plays for the Launceston Players.⁵⁴

1955

Barbara Bingley and N. Melville Shepard, *Ae Fond Kiss, A Play in One Act*.

Published: London: Samuel French Limited, 1955.

During a visit with his “Clarinda” in Edinburgh, Burns roughly kisses an impertinent serving wench who turns out to be the daughter of Lord Patullo in disguise. In the altercation which follows, Burns confesses to Mrs. MacLehose that the “ane wha paid for yer platronics” is her own serving girl Jenny Clow. Their relationship over, after one last kiss they part but not before Burns promises to write a song for her.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Alabama Journal* (14 February, 1953), 3; *Richmond Times Dispatch* (13 September, 1953), 47; *Petaluma Argus Courier* (23 March, 1955), 3; *The Herald* [Illinois] (5 April, 1956), 32.

⁵⁴ *Mercury* [Hobart, Tasmania] (14 May, 1954), 11; *Examiner* [Launceston] (27 May, 1954), 24.

⁵⁵ *Burns Chronicle*, 1956, 112.

1956

Donald Mackenzie (1916-1999), *Rabbie Burns Slept Here*.

Originally staged: Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh, 14 May, 1956. Typescript: National Library of Scotland, Archives and Manuscripts, Acc.9706,129 pp.

When an American electronics manufacturing company decides it has found the best location to open a factory in Scotland, it turns out that Robert Burns once slept in a house on the property. The president of the company, a transplanted Scot living in America, arrives to negotiate with locals who are outraged that a foreign entity is bent on desecrating a Scottish heritage site. This comedy featured popular Scottish stage and film actors Duncan Macrae, Andrew Keir, Ian Cuthbertson, and James Gibson.⁵⁶

1959

Sandy Ross Thomas, *I, Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Green's Playhouse, Ayr, 16 June, 1959. Not printed.

Alexander McMillan, Alex Ross Taylor, and Thomas Limond wrote the script for this pageant play, combining their names into the pseudonym "Sandy Ross Thomas," and the music was written and arranged by Ian Whyte, director of the Scottish Symphony Orchestra. The event was in part a traditional historical pageant—besides the principals there were approximately 150 performers—in addition to having scenes and dialogue performed by professional actors Andrew Keir (Burns), Annette Crosbie (Jean Armour), and Gwenyth Guthrie (Highland Mary), along with a dozen local actors. Scenes enacted from Burns's life (a meeting of the Crochallan Fencibles, Burns being made Poet Laureate at Lodge Canongate Kilwinning, Burns's death in Dumfries) were interwoven with histrionic performances of some of his poems, evidenced by characters listed in the program such as Plenty, Rural Joy, Hospitality, and Agriculture in "The Brigs of Ayr." Produced by The Burns Federation and Ayr Town Council as the signature event of the Burns bicentennial celebrations that year, audience attendance was not as high as anticipated over five nights. This pageant play was revived in 2009 as part of celebrations surrounding the 250th anniversary of the poet's birth.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *The Stage* [London] (17 May, 1956), 10; *Rabbie Burns Slept Here*, Royal Lyceum Theatre poster.

⁵⁷ *Burns Chronicle* 1960, 74-76; *Irvine Herald* (19 June, 1959) 2; <https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1101/>; *Daily Record* (6 February, 2009).

1959

Joe Corrie, *There Was A Lad*.

Originally staged: Greenock Players at the Concert Hall, Troon, 7 January, 1959. Typescripts, National Library of Scotland, Archives and Manuscripts, MS.26496, 45 pp.

This short play involves Burns's conflicts with Kirk elders, presumably during his Mauchline/Mossgiel period, and it may be a truncated adaptation of scenes from his 1936 full-length play *Robert Burns*.⁵⁸

1961

Timothy Gray (1926-2007) and Warren B. Meyers, *Tam O'Shanter*, or *Ev'ry Laddie Has a Lassie*

Typescript: UCLA Library Special Collections, Danny Daniels Papers LSC.1925, Box 38, folders 4-7.

This 1961 musical about the life of Burns featured original music by Meyers, and contained original lyrics by Gray as well as lyrics by Burns. A 1963 article in his hometown Alabama newspaper, credits Hugh Martin (1914-2011)—film and theater composer who won an Academy Award for “The Trolley Song” from *Meet Me in St. Louis*—as the composer and Gray as his collaborator. The new incarnation was at different times called *Tam O'Shanter* or *Tamoshanta*, and was purported to be ready for an opening on the West End in the fall of 1964. Actor Richard Burton's name was dangled in the press as a possibility for the role of Burns, while Edward Woodward and Albert Finney were also said to be under consideration. Martin and Gray also collaborated on a musical adaptation of Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, which had a successful run on Broadway and the West End under the title *High Spirits*, beginning in April 1964, directed by Coward.⁵⁹

Norman Rosten (1913-1995), *Robin Wrote A Book*.

Not printed.

A play with music based on the life of Robert Burns, music by Max Meth, lyrics by Burns. American poet, playwright, and novelist Rosten was best known for his poetry, his stage adaptation of Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, and a book about his friendship with Marilyn Monroe. This play was mentioned in the New York press as scheduled for a production in

⁵⁸ *Burns Chronicle* 1960, 160; *The Stage* [London] (24 March, 1960), 17; (13 April, 1960), 19.

⁵⁹ *Birmingham News* [Alabama] (22 September, 1963), 84; *Philadelphia Inquirer* (25 May, 1964), 19.

1964. Rosten wrote in a 1982 essay, “I wrote the book for a musical about Robert Burns that never quite raised the million or so for production.”⁶⁰

1963

Norman Luboff (1917-1987), *Highland Fling*.

Typescript and lyric sheets: Norman Luboff Papers, 1940-1988, 105/8, 126-127, Library of Congress.

Director of the Norman Luboff Choir, recording artist, and arranger and composer of over eighty film scores, Luboff, an American, while living in London and the south of France from 1958 to 1963 wrote this “musical fantasy” based on the life of Burns. The author of the book for the musical is not identified in press reports or the Library of Congress listing, however the song titles indicate that Luboff used Burns songs as well as composing original melodies. Though the project was mentioned in many articles about Luboff as being in consideration with producers, a production was never realized. In an interview a year before his death, Luboff referred to his musical with the title *Robert Burns—Minstrel*.⁶¹

1965

Mark Conratt and Greg Dawson, *Great Scot! A Musical Play in Two Acts*. Originally staged: Theatre Four, New York City, 11 November, 1965. Published: New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1969.

Music by Don McAfee and lyrics by Nancy Leeds. The Off-Broadway premier of this musical was publicized as a springboard for a Broadway run. The narrative covers a roguish Burns getting into trouble with James Armour, being celebrated in Edinburgh, espousing radical political views, and finally returning to Mossiel to marry Jean. Critics felt the costumes were lavish and the songs catchy, and there was consensus that it suffered from a dull book and a lack of authenticity—one reviewer bemoaned that the play needed “a good shot of Scotch. Not the fluid kind, but the atmospheric and the musical.” This lusty and carousing Burns (portrayed by Scottish actor Allan Bruce) may have been informed by the recent success of Albert Finney in the film *Tom Jones*. In the final scene, Burns wears a kilt to show his unbowed spirit in the face of English subjugation. No Broadway production was forthcoming. Several of the original songs

⁶⁰ *Brooklyn Heights Press* (7 March, 1963), 1; Norman Rosten, “Culture Inside and Outside: Random Thoughts on Our Situation,” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, vol. 21, p. 60.

⁶¹ *San Francisco Examiner* (29 September, 1963), 159; *Danville News* [Penn.] (25 March, 1969), 3; *News and Observer* [Raleigh] (4 May, 1986), 114.

were published individually as sheet music, with piano arrangements and guitar chords, by Valendo Music Corp., New York, in 1965.⁶²

Tom Wright (1923-2002), *There Was A Man*.

Originally staged: Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, 25 January, 1965. Typescript: Roy Collection, University of South Carolina, OCLC: 57314096, 34 pp.; Scottish Theatre Collection, University of Glasgow, GB 247 STA JCB 21.

Actor John Cairney contacted playwright Tom Wright in 1962 to ask if he would accept a commission to pen a one-man play about Robert Burns. Wright accepted and *There Was A Man* was first performed in 1965, with music by Fred Spedding, directed by Gerard Slevin. It ran at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that year and was moved to Arts Theatre, London, 13 November, 1968, and two television versions (1966 and 1968) followed. Both the play and Cairney were consistently well reviewed and even though Wright wanted other actors to take the role (Brian Cox, Victor Carin, Maurice Rooves, Peer Lincoln, and Peter Raffan all did), because of their collaboration Cairney continues to be the Scottish actor most associated with the Bard. While the play is a fairly straightforward stage biography of Burns as a creative artist and a romantic figure, what added to the theatrical experience for audiences was the use of direct address and audience interaction written into the script and also improvised by Cairney, a classically trained actor with a charismatic demeanor.⁶³

1967

Phil Coulter (b. 1942) and Bill Martin (1938-2020), *Rabbie*.

Published: promotional LP, *Rabbie, A New Musical*, KPM Music Group, London (n.d.).

This musical by the award-winning pop-song writing duo best known for “Saturday Night,” recorded by The Bay City Rollers, focuses on a ten-year period in Burns’s life, primarily his time in Mauchline and Edinburgh. The lyrics (Martin) and music (Coulter) are all original except for “My Luve’s Like A Red, Red Rose.” There is a “drunken nightmare scene” evoking “Tam o’Shanter” and at the finale Burns is on trial for treason. It has not yet been determined if this musical was ever performed.⁶⁴

⁶² *Daily News* [New York] (12 November, 1965), 498; *New York Times* (12 November, 1965), 56; *Orlando Evening Star* (12 November, 1965), 7; *Newsday* [Long Island] (12 November, 1965), 82.

⁶³ *The Guardian* (31 August, 1965), 7, (1 October, 1965), 11, and (14 November, 1968), 8; John Cairney, *The Man Who Played Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1987).

⁶⁴ *Liverpool Echo* (8 April, 1967), 22; *Disc and Music Echo* (23 March, 1968), 18.

Lesley Storm (1898-1975), *Three Goose Quills and a Knife*.

Originally staged: Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, 2 September, 1967. Typescript: Scottish Theatre Collection, University of Glasgow, GB 247 STA 2G1 1-16, 136 pp.

Under the pseudonym "Lesley Storm," Margaret Clark wrote plays, novels, short stories, and screenplays. Storm/Clark said that her *Three Goose Quills and a Knife*, "covers the adult life of Robert Burns from his twenties to his death at the age of thirty-seven," and she felt that it would defy expectations and stereotypes by showing Burns as the man and revolutionary "he really was." The structure of the play is episodic, a series of loosely connected incidents. Though it was well received, with one critic even voicing his expectation that it would become a staple of Scottish theater, there has been no revival.⁶⁵

1968

John Cairney (b. 1930), *The Robert Burns Story*.

Originally staged: Theatre Royal, Dumfries, 1968. Published: in *Burnscripts*, Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011.

Described in the published script as "A two-hour solo play based on the life and work of Scotland's national bard," Cairney wrote this play as a substitute for *There Was a Man*, so that he could perform and tour in it as Burns at his own discretion and without a set. So jointly-associated with Burns had playwright Wright and actor Cairney become that a review of *The Robert Burns Story* in Sydney in 1981 states, "Original Adaptation by Tom Wright." The play was released as an audio recording, *John Cairney Tells the Robert Burns Story* (Edinburgh: REL Records 1976).⁶⁶

1972

Agnes Adams, *The Bachelors' Club, A Play About Robert Burns*.

Published: Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1972.

Robert Burns's reputation proceeds him in this one-act, which takes place in the backroom of Jock Richard's licensed house in Tarbolton, prior to a meeting of the Bachelor's Club. Characters include poet David Sillar.

⁶⁵ *The Stage* [London] (24 August, 1967), 16, and (4 September, 1967), 13; *The Guardian* (4 September, 1967) 5; Chris Ravenhall, "Lesley Storm's *Three Goose Quills and a Knife*: A Burns Play Rediscovered," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 32 (2001): 46-54.

⁶⁶ John Cairney, *Burnscripts* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011), 258; *Sydney Morning Herald* (24 February, 1981), 8.

Gerry Carroll, *For Promised Joy!*

Originally staged: The Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Berkeley, California, 10 May, 1972. Not printed.

Advertised as a new play about “Scotland’s famous rebel Robert Burns,” and described as “gutsy, bawdy, brutal,” press for this play gives the impression that the author had integrated the free-love zeitgeist of the moment into his script. The story of *For Promised Joy!* is told in flashback as Burns looks at his life and loves via a “furious montage of images, dances, snatches of song.” One advertisement for the production showed a drawing of two sets of legs on a bed, sticking out of a confessional adorned with a crucifix.⁶⁷

1973

Arnold Johnston, *The Witching Voice*.

Originally staged: The New Vic Theatre, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 23 February, 1973. Published: Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1973.

This full-length play with music in three acts and twenty-nine scenes takes place primarily in Mauchline and Mossgiel in 1785-86, and the scenes in the final act take place in Edinburgh with Agnes McLehose and William Creech before the play ends in Tarbolton. The title comes from the third stanza of Burns’s “A Prayer in the Prospect of Death”: “And listening to their witching voice/ Has often led me wrong.” The play was revived several times, as recently as 2009. Johnston also recorded two LPs on which he performs Burns’s poems and songs: *Burns* (Kalamazoo: Aural Press [ca 1970]); and *Robert Burns in Poetry, Song, and Prose* (New York: CMS Records, Inc., 1971; Middlesex: Peerless Record Co., 1973).⁶⁸

1976

Joan Biggar, *A Bird’s Wing Beating*.

Originally staged: Harbour Arts Theatre, Irvine Burns Festival, 1976. Published: Scottish Society of Playwrights (Ardrossan, 197[?]); Typescript: Mitchell Library, Glasgow, 79 pp.

This play depicts an episode of Burns’s life in Irvine.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* (7 May, 1972), 186, 191; and (10 May, 1972), 46.

⁶⁸ *Holland Sentinel* [Michigan] (15 December, 1975), 36; *Battle Creek Enquirer* (6 February, 1976), 36; Thomas Keith, “A Discography of Robert Burns, 1948-2002,” *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 33-34 (2004): 387-412 (393).

⁶⁹ John Cairney, *Burnscripts*, Luath Press Limited (Edinburgh: 2011), 257; *Burns Chronicle* 1978, 8; http://www.ayrshirehistory.org.uk/Bibliography/books_ab.htm.

1979

John Cairney, *A Drunk Man Looks at Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: The Village Theatre, East Kilbride, March 1979. Typescript: Scottish Theatre Collection, University of Glasgow, GB 247 STA Mn 36/7, 61 pp.

Performed at the Gaiety Theatre in Ayr as part of the Burns Festival later in 1979, this comic two-hander involves the character of Actor (not surprisingly named John Cairney), dressed either as Burns or in a tuxedo, giving a lecture/presentation on Burns when he is interrupted by the character Drunk Man (named Anderson) who immediately engages the audience, taking control of the evening. Droll and uninhibited, the drunk first quotes the stanzas about Burns in Hugh MacDiarmid's poem "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle," then mistakes Actor for the actual Burns. The two men argue, philosophize, sing, recite, and ruminate. Drunk Man challenges Actor's elitist assumptions about Burns in an attempt to convey what Burns means to working-class Scots, corresponding with some of MacDiarmid's arguments about Burns from the poem. Drunk Man was played by Russell Hunter and Actor by Cairney.⁷⁰

1980

Neil Munro (1947-2009), *Robert Burns: Out of Print*.

Originally staged: National Arts Centre, Ottawa, 19 February, 1980. Not printed.

Scottish-born Canadian actor and writer Neil Munro wrote and acted in this one-man play, intended not to "present [Burns] as some ethnic hero." Six months before his death in 1796, Burns is looking back, reliving and reenacting formative events from his life. The play also includes interpretations of some of Burns's poems and songs, including some from *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*.⁷¹

1981

Donald Campbell (1940-2019), *Till All the Seas Run Dry*.

Originally staged: Riverview Playhouse, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, 9 April, 1981. Published: Edinburgh: Fairplay Press, 2007.

A play about Burns as seen through the eyes of his wife, Jean Armour. It was produced in Scotland at the Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, in October of 1981 and was also adapted for the radio in Scotland, airing 30

⁷⁰ *The Stage* [London] (8 March, 1979), 4; and (5 July, 1979), 14.

⁷¹ *Ottawa Citizen* (14 February, 1980), 75, and (20 February, 1980), 74; *The Gazette* [Montreal] (16 February, 1980), 92; *Ottawa Journal* (20 February, 1980), 35.

January, 1982. Scottish poet and playwright Campbell wrote that one of his impressions from seeing a clip of the American production was that the director “was deeply influenced by the musical *Brigadoon*.” The Scottish production received appreciative and favorable reviews.⁷²

1982

Jean Wintroppe, *Oh, Robert, Robert!*

Originally staged: Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 1982. Not printed.

A one-woman show about Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop and her relationship to Burns, performed by the author.⁷³

1984

Dorothy Dunbar, *A Sang for Rabbie, A Historical Comedy in One Act*.

Published: Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1984.

This one-act play involves three lady weavers in Stewarton and their excitement over Burns's interest in buying one of their bonnets before he sails to Jamaica; the incident has no corollary in history. The author also wrote *Cutty Sark*, a one-act that is a backstory for the witch Nannie from “Tam o'Shanter.”

Jim Peck, *Rab the Rhymer: An Evening With Robert Burns*.

Staged: Academy Theatre First Stage, Atlanta Georgia, 16 March, 1985.

Not printed.

Directed by Atlanta playwright Peck, this play with music was performed by John Forrest Ferguson for more than ten years in the United States, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1985, and at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1990. Clark Taylor played the role in 2001.⁷⁴

1986

John Cairney, *Scot Free!*

Originally staged: The Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock, 5 September, 1988.

Published: in *Burnscripts*, Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011.

With original music by Geoff Davidson, this musical was developed and rewritten over the course of twenty-one years and produced under

⁷² *Daily Press* [Norfolk] (9 April, 1981), 31; *The Guardian* (30 January, 1982), 10; Trevor Royle, *The Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1993).

⁷³ John Cairney, “A History of Solo Theatre” (unpublished M.Litt (R) thesis, University of Glasgow, 1988): online since January 2020 in *Enlighten: Theses: University of Glasgow E-Thesis Repository*: <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/76820/>.

⁷⁴ *Atlanta Constitution* (16 March, 1985), 95; *Clarion-Ledger* [Jackson, Mississippi] (16 January, 1990), 33.

successive titles *Scot Free!* (1986-88), *Love and Marriage, Robert Burns* (1989), *There Was A Lad* (1990), and *Red, Red Rose* (2007). Twenty musical numbers cover Burns's time in Mauchline, at Mossiel, and in Edinburgh.⁷⁵

1990

Lara Jane Bunting, *Love But Her*.

Originally staged: Scottish Youth Theatre at The Olivier Theatre, London, 11 July, 1990. Typescript: Scottish Theatre Collection, University of Glasgow, GB 247 STA SAC 149.

Jean Armour's life is explored in this drama using four actors, several Burns songs, a bare stage, and minimal props. It was revived in 1993 at the Brunton Theatre in Edinburgh and in 2009 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.⁷⁶

1992

Diane Torr (1948-2017), *Ready Aye Ready (a standing cock has nae conscience)*.

Originally staged: 19 February, 1992, The Club at La MaMa E.T.C., New York City. Typescript: Diane Torr Papers, Downtown Collection, New York University Special Collections, MSS.527, 10 pp.

After its premiere, *Ready Aye Ready* ran for a three weeks at P. S. 122 in New York City starting 19 March, 1992 and later toured to Pennsylvania, Ontario, and Baltimore. Known for her Drag King workshops, Scottish performance artist Diane Torr created a Burns narrative centered around *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* and the eighteenth-century Scottish bawdy song tradition, "as literate as [it was] irreverent." In this "parodic lecture-demonstration," Torr performed in male drag as low-key, working-class Hamish McAlastair from Dumfries. One reviewer observed, "Torr's performance is not only a tribute to Burns the poet, but also to Burns the champion of the working class." The original run also included four male dancers in obvious female drag, four female hip hop dancers in male drag, a piper, a fiddler, and bawdy set pieces.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ John Cairney, *Burnscripts*, (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011).

⁷⁶ *Dundee Courier* (22 May, 1990), 3; *The Stage* [London] (18 February, 1993), 15.

⁷⁷ *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance* by Diane Torr and Stephen Bottoms (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) 176; Caroline Palmer, "Diane Torr Delivers Bawdy Burns," *Paper* magazine, New York, March, 1992, 26; John Michael Koroly, "Torr-de-Force for Perf. Artist" *Cultural Arts Bulletin*, March 1992; Erin Walter, "Predating the 'Glasgow

1994

Gil Bowman, *Toasting the Lassies*.

Originally staged: Edinburgh Fringe Festival, August 1994. Published: Edinburgh: The Stockbridge Music Business, 1994.

Using the Burns love songs from her 1994 CD, *Toasting the Lassies*, (London: Greentraxx, 1994), Gill Bowman created this one-woman play with music about the backstories of some of the poet's love interests and their relationships to Burns. Accompanying herself on guitar, her character is hostess, confident, and gossip, creating a dramatic context for the woman who are most often experienced solely from Burns's perspective. The play was commissioned by the Burns International Festival 1996, Bowman performed it on the radio, took it on tour, and has since continued to develop and perform it, as recently as 2020.⁷⁸

1995

Madeline Taylor, *The Life and Times of Tibbie Pagan*.

Originally staged: Diverse Attractions at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 14 August, 1995. Not printed.

Though "Ca' the Yowes" has long been attributed to Burns, it is unsigned in the *Scots Musical Museum*, and an alternative possibility is that it was originally collected or actually written by another Ayrshire poet, Isabel Pagan (ca. 1740-1821).⁷⁹ From the Festival program: "Songstress, illicit whisky seller, original composer of 'Ca' the Yowes,' carouser, authoress, lover, witch, hag. All said of this extraordinary woman who really lived in the Ayrshire of the industrial revolution. Meet her!"⁸⁰

1996

John Fowler, *I, Roberto*.

Originally staged: Dumfries and Galloway Arts Festival, 1996. Typescript:

Miracle': the 1990s avant-garde art of Diane Torr at Franklin Furnace," *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 25 (2020): 24-30.

⁷⁸ *Burns Chronicle*, Dec. 1994, 64, and W2003, 23-24; *The Guardian* (18 December, 1995), 40.

⁷⁹ The song is not included in Pagan's *Collection of Songs* (Glasgow: Niven, 1805), but the attribution goes back to Struteers (1821), Cunningham (1825), Stenhouse (1837), and Paterson (1840). See Murray Pittock, in *Oxford Edition of Robert Burns*, III (2017), 85-86; Kirsteen McCue, "Burns, Women, and Song," in Robert Crawford, ed., *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority* (Ames, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 45-460-57 (45-46); McCue, in *Oxford Edition of Robert Burns*, IV (2021), 539-540; and cf. Patrick Scott & Jo DuRant, *Robert Burns Lives!*, no. 207 (Dec. 0, 2014): https://electricScotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives207.htm.

⁸⁰ *Edinburgh Fringe Festival Program 1995*, 68.

Roy Collection, University of South Carolina, 19 pp.

This one-man play imagines Burns's last days in Jamaica after ten years there as a bookkeeper. Burns cogitates on life with his best friend, an enslaved man named John Dole, his friendship with Toussaint L'Ouverture, the public torture of slaves, the wife of a local planter with whom he has had an affair, the child he fathered with a mulatto woman who has become his common law wife, and his imminent return to Scotland.⁸¹

John Mackintosh, *The Ghaist, A Tale*.

Originally staged: Incognito Amateur Theatre Co., Glen Pavilion, Dunfermline, 18 September, 1996. Published: Kirkcaldy: II Mac Publications, 1996.

Each of the three acts in this play is narrated by a ghostly figure who the audience comes to understand is Scottish poet Robert Ferguson, now aware of his deep influence on Burns. The ghost of Ferguson introduces each of the scenes and remains in the background, occasionally commenting on the action, which moves from a flax dressing shed in Irvine, to a meeting of the Crochallan Fencibles at an Edinburgh pub, to Burns's House in Dumfries with Jean Armour and Jessie Lewars where the ghost comments on the action before welcoming Burns to the afterlife. The entire play is written with a strong use of Scots and phonetic dialect throughout. It was later produced in Newtownmore in 1997, and as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1998. Mackintosh rewrote and expanded the play in 2015, now titled *The Daft Days*.⁸²

George Rosie (b. 1941), *Red, Red Rose*.

Originally staged: The Concert Hall, Aarhus, Denmark, 21 September, 1996. Published: Nine songs appear on *Musicals of the Year 1996*, Amsterdam: Columbus Records, 1996.

With original music and adaptations of Burns's lyrics by Paul Alan Johnson. Sometime before 1992, producer David Gest put forward the idea of a musical based on the life of Robert Burns to be produced by actor Anthony Perkins and directed by MGM musical star Gene Kelly, and he created a promotional CD for backers. It was regularly conveyed in the press that the idea came from pop star Michael Jackson and his compositions for Burns lyrics, however no comment by Jackson was ever made on the subject, no songs have surfaced, and no copyrights for any

⁸¹ Letter from John Fowler to G. Ross Roy, 6 February, 2008, Roy Collection, University of South Carolina.

⁸² www.john-mackintosh.com. Email from John Mackintosh to Thomas Keith, 25 July, 2021.

related material by him were ever registered. In 1993 actor Kirk Douglas held a fundraiser for planned London and New York productions. Starring a kilted John Barrowman as Burns, the musical was produced in 1996 for an International Musical Theater competition in Denmark where it took third place. However, it was poorly received in the press, one critic calling it “a spectacularly terrible dollop of pseudo-Scots kitsch” that “best resembles an unholy marriage of ‘Which Witch?’ and ‘Brigadoon.’”⁸³

Diana Yearman, *For A' That*. Originally staged: Performing Arts Center, Elgin Community College, Illinois, 8 November, 1996. Not printed.

An ensemble of twenty-one, using traditional Scottish melodies and Burns's lyrics, enacts scenes from the last twelve years of the poet's life, with a particular focus in this play on his lyric writing and song collecting. The narrative closes at Burns's mausoleum “as he reflects on how his passionate poetic nature has driven him to actions that seem to contradict his stated beliefs.”⁸⁴

1998

Donald Mackenzie, *Good Morning Mr. Burns*.

Originally staged: Theatre Alba at the Netherbow, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 10 August, 1998. Not printed.

In this one-woman show, a businesswoman named Lorna refuses to idolize Burns the way her parents did, yet is obsessed with him in her own way. She carries on a conversation with a life-size statue of Burns in her living room, challenging his love affairs, reckless behavior, politics, and high ideals.⁸⁵

2000

Stewart Ennis, *Robert Burns Invites You: Out to Lunch*.

Originally staged: Gallus Theatre Company at Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 3 August, 2000. Not printed.

With guitarist Alan Tall, playwright and actor Ennis as Burns begins the play in a scene depicting Burns's death. He then assembles members of the audience onstage to act out a scene at an inn in which Burns expounds on “Scottish issues of the day” through both scripted material and adlibs.⁸⁶

⁸³ *New York Times* (9 April, 1993), 32, and (25 September, 1996); *The Guardian* (17 January, 2012).

⁸⁴ *Chicago Daily News* (20 October, 1996), 275; *Daily Herald* [Chicago] (30 August, 1996), 451.

⁸⁵ *Herald* [Scotland] (13 August, 1998); *The Stage* [London] (20 August, 1998), 24.

⁸⁶ *The Stage* [London] (3 August, 2000), 33, and (24 August, 2000), 22.

2006

Catherine Czerkawaska, *Burns on the Solway*.

Originally staged: A Play, A Pie, and A Pint at the Oran Mor, Glasgow, 20 February, 2006. Self-published in a Kindle edition, Amazon, 2011.

This one-act play begins during Burns's last weeks when he went for health cures at Solway, then Burns and Jean Armour take turns recounting scenes from their shared past.⁸⁷

2008

Mike Webb, *Clarinda, The Musical*.

Originally staged: Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh, 25 January, 2008. Published: Horsham: Stagescripts, Inc. [licensing only], n.d.; CD, Aberdeen: Honest Toil Productions, 2008.

Book and lyrics by Mike Webb and music by Kevin Walsh with some traditional Burns songs. A musical dramatization of the relationship between Nancy (Agnes McLehose) and Burns using their letters to one another as Sylvander and Clarinda, Nancy's estrangement from her husband, and Burns's conflicts, and eventual resolution, with Jean Armour. In America it was produced by Live Theatre at the Beach, Jacksonville, Florida, 25 January, 2013, sponsored by the St. Andrews Society of Jacksonville.⁸⁸

2009

John Cairney, *The Boyhood of Burns, Seven Short Plays for School Children*.

Originally staged: Maybole Town Hall, Maybole, Ayrshire, 31 October, 2008. Published: in *Burnscripts*, Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2011.

Linked together with music and a Narrator, the seven plays, their settings, and the years during which they happen, are as follows: *The Lesson*, Alloway school house, 1766; *The Vision*, a field/Burns home at Mount Oliphant, 1767; *Playtime*, the street exterior of Alloway school house, 1769; *Halloween*, interior of Burns house at Mount Oliphant, 1770; *Sabbath Day*, exterior farmland on Mount Oliphant, 1771; *The Songsmith*, the autumn harvest field at Mount Oliphant, 1772; *The Wordsmith*, exterior of a Mauchline Street, 1773. These short plays are written in such a way that performing them individually is an option.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ <https://www.catherineczerkawaska.co.uk/>.

⁸⁸ "Clarinda Synopsis" Stagescripts.com; <https://www.abettheatre.com/2012-2013-season-21/clarinda-the-musical/>.

⁸⁹ "Renowned Actor, Writer, and Artist, John Cairney, Returns to Maybole," *Maybole.org* (October 2009).

John Hardie, *King o' Men*.

Originally staged: National Arts Centre, Fourth Stage, Ottawa, 10 January, 2009. Not printed.

The author performed the role of John Rankine in this one-person play, accompanied by two musicians, about "a friend's" reaction to the death of Burns and subsequent attempt to educate an Englishman who is planning to write a book about Burns. It was later produced at the CelticFest, Vancouver in March 2009.⁹⁰

Anna Hillis, *Tea with Clarinda*.

Originally staged: Gatehouse of Fleet Burns Club, Castle Douglas, 12 June, 2009. Not printed.

This one-act is a speculative enactment of the meeting between Jean Armour and Agnes Macle hose in Edinburgh after Burns's death. It toured Scotland in the summer of 2009, part of the "Homecoming Scotland" year.⁹¹

2010

Janet Paisley (1948-2018), *The Lasses, O*.

Originally staged: Henderson's at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 6 August, 2010. Not printed.

Writing entirely in Scots, novelist and poet Paisley dramatized Burns through the perspectives of five of the lesser known women in his life: midwife Agnes McLure, cousin Betty Davidson, Burns's mother-in-law Mary Smith, the daughter of a local smuggler, and Jessie Lewars.⁹²

2012

Donald Smith, *Robert Burns: Rough Cut*.

Originally staged: Jury's Inn, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 3 August, 2012. Not printed.

Adapted from Smith's 2009 novel, *Between Ourselves*, this one-man play navigates Burns six months in Edinburgh and the challenges he faced with his finances, William Creech, and his love affairs. The play was

⁹⁰ https://www.theepochtimes.com/ecosse-robbie-burns-ottawa-nac_1526840.html;
<https://www.straight.com/article-205340/robbie-burns-celebrated-celticfest>.

⁹¹ <http://burnshowffclub.org/blog/blog/archives/2009/10/start=2009-10-25.html>;
<https://www.scotslanguage.com/news/1315>.

⁹² Irene Brown, "The Lasses, O" by Janet Paisley," *EdinburghGuide.com* (23 August, 2010); *New York Times* obituary (23 November, 2018), A25.

revived in 2016 and 2017 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, directed by Smith.⁹³

2013

Peter Burton, *Rhymer Rab—Patriot Bard*.

Self-published: Glasgow, 2013.

“A drama about the life of Robert Burns,” this play, which has not yet been produced, offers thirty-seven unconnected scenes from Burns’s life, in three acts. Notable characters include William Pitt, Thom Paine, William Creech, Thomas Muir, and Bob Dylan.⁹⁴

2014

Keara Murphy, *Mice & Women*.

Originally staged: “The Big Burns Supper,” Cairndale Parkhouse, Dumfries, 26 January 2014. Not printed.

As described by the author, this one-woman comedy is “a modern feminist parallel” to the Burns poem “To A Mouse,” incorporating themes from John Steinbeck’s novella *Of Mice and Men*.⁹⁵

2015

Andrew Dallmeyer (1945–2017), *Rabbie: Scotland’s Superstar*.

Originally staged: Surgeon’s Hall, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 17 August, 2015. Not printed.

With musical arrangements of traditional Scottish tunes by Kennedy Aitchinson, book and original lyrics by Edinburgh playwright and actor Andrew Dallmeyer. Developed as *Rabbie* in performances at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival by the Third Degree Youth Theatre in 2015, and by Captivate Theatre at the Festival in 2017, 2018, and 2019, as well as performance at other Edinburgh venues in 2018, 2019, and 2022. Several performances were planned for 2020 and 2021 but cancelled because of the global pandemic. Productions in 2021 and 2022 were advertised with the title, *Rabbie: Scotland’s Superstar*. It is based on a children’s musical composed by David Todd with book and lyrics by Dallmeyer. Told by an ensemble, the biographical story depicts scenes from Burns’s life interpolated with toasts and speeches from modern Burns Suppers as well as with contemporary commentary on the action. This is achieved with original lyrics paired to well-recognized tunes from Burns songs, such as

⁹³ Alexandra Wilks, “Burns—Rough Cut (Gavin Paul),” *Three Weeks in Edinburgh* online (23 August, 2012); <https://broadwaybaby.com/shows/robert-burns-rough-cut/721736>

⁹⁴ <https://rhymerrab.blogspot.com/2014/>, and see first blog from 2013 also.

⁹⁵ *Big Burns Supper Festival* programme, 2014; <https://kearamurphy.com/burns/>.

this stanza from the opening number, set to the melody for “Auld Lang Syne”: “You’ve seen him on the shortbread tin/ He is a global brand/ With big brown eyes and wistful sighs/ And honor to command.”⁹⁶

Rod Grant, *A Man’s A Man, The Lives of Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Clifton Hall at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 3 August, 2015. Self-published by Rod Grant as a novel, Edinburgh, 2017.

Colleagues at Clifton Hall School, Martin Franssen (music) and Rod Grant (book and lyrics) created a musical that spans most of Burns’s life “combining traditional Scottish [music] with orchestral and rock sounds,” with the aim of making the story “accessible.” Eighteen of the songs are original while six are traditional (maintaining Burns’s original lyrics), yet all of them have been adapted and arranged to contain both contemporary and traditional folk elements. After casting the initial production with students from Clifton Hall School and Queen Margaret University alongside professionals in the leading roles, it was restaged at the Fringe Festival in 2018, and then again at the Festival with all professional actors in 2019. Each incarnation received primarily favorable reviews.⁹⁷

Kenneth N. Ross, *Sparks of Celestial Fire*.

Originally staged: Tryst Theatre Company at the Coach Theatre, Alloa, 26 September, 2015. Not printed.

Using “music, comedy, and verse,” actors playing Jean Armour and Robert Burns, plus three musicians and nine narrators, introduce Burns at his death bed, then enact scenes in Ayrshire before and after he is celebrated for his poetry.⁹⁸

Tish Tindall, *Robert Burns—The Musical*.

Originally staged: Tivoli Theatre, Aberdeen, 25 January, 2015. Not printed.

A completely new edition of David Gest’s 1996 project, *A Red, Red Rose*, this time with music and lyrics by Tish Tindall. In the author’s stated attempt “to get away from the *Brigadoon* vision of Scotland,” Burns and his boyhood self, both kilted, are now transported to the twenty-first century where his celebrity skyrockets and he faces the challenges of

⁹⁶ *Edinburgh Fringe Festival* programme, 2015, 362; <https://www.first-scottish.co.uk/burns-supper-the-musical/>; “Captivate Theatre Rabbie 24th January 2018 ACT 01” *YouTube* (6 February, 2018).

⁹⁷ *Edinburgh Fringe Festival* programme, 2015, 274; *Edinburgh Evenings News* (3 August, 2015); *BroadwayBaby.com* (11 August, 2019).

⁹⁸ Kirsty Paterson, “Sparks Fly in Falkirk Tryst’s New Burns’ Play,” *Falkirk Herald* online (24 September, 2015).

superstardom, reality TV, and social media. After the premier in Aberdeen, again with talk of going to Broadway, the show toured Scotland and has twice been produced at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, in 2018 and 2019.⁹⁹

2016

Victoria Bianchi, *CauseWay*.

Originally staged: A Play, A Pie, and A Pint at the Oran Mor, Glasgow, 25 January, 2016. Not printed.

In 1914, two suffragettes, Frances Parker and Ethel Moorhead, rode their bicycles loaded up with explosive devices to Alloway with the intention of blowing up the Burns Cottage, but were caught just as they lit the fuse. Conceived as site-specific theater to be performed at the Burns Cottage, this play depicts the women first meeting and intersperses songs of Burns amidst the politics of suffragettes to explore issues of women's rights and violent extremism.¹⁰⁰

Keara Murphy, *The Secret Sex Life of Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Netherbow Theatre, Scottish Storytelling Center, 21 January 2016. Not printed.

Performed with a cast of five and described as “documentary-drama” this appears to be a stage adaptation of Murphy's 2015 documentary about Burns's loves and his sex life that aired on BBC Radio Scotland.¹⁰¹

2018

Simon Beattie and Bruce Strachan, *Ae Fond Kiss*.

Originally staged: No Nonsense Productions, Eastwood Park Theatre, Glasgow, 13 February, 2018. Not printed.

Original music composed by Matthew Brown. The character of Burns narrates this musical play, in modern, colloquial, and period dialogue, via direct address, backed up by three other actors who perform scenes from Burns's life and sing some of his most famous songs. Painter Alexander Nasmyth makes a cameo appearance.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Playbill.com* 7 January, 2015; *dailyrecord.co.uk* (22 January, 2015); *New Yorker*, 27 August, 2008; *The Herald* [Scotland] (22 August, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ <https://playpiepint.com/plays/causeway/>; *Aberdeen Evening Express* (9 July, 1914), 2.

¹⁰¹ *Scotsman* online (17 January, 2016); <https://kearamurphy.com/burns>.

¹⁰² <https://theweereview.com/review/ae-fond-kiss/>; Gareth K, “Ae Fond Dramaturgy” *Vile Blog* (11 February, 2018).

Shonagh Murray, *Armour: A Herstory of the Scottish Bard*.

Originally staged: Fearless Players at Jury's Inn, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 15 August, 2018.

Published: digital CD of selected songs, Oakland: Bandcamp, 2020.

Co-founder of Fearless Players, a female-led theater company, Shonagh Murray wrote the book and original songs for this story about the 1821 meeting between Jean Armour and Agnes McLehose, with lyrics by Burns and Murray. Laced with humor and alcohol, the dramatic encounter is highlighted by some of the songs Burns wrote for and about the two women, and at least one of the songs incorporates text from his letters. After a well-reviewed run at the Edinburgh Festival, it was revived there in 2019, and ran also at the Swallow Theatre in January 2020.¹⁰³

2019

Gillian Duffy, *The Ghosting of Robert Burns*.

Originally staged: Cumbernauld Theatre, 1 February, 2019. Not printed.

A recently heartbroken and cynical author escapes to her aunt's cottage in Ayrshire on, by chance, Burns Night. It turns out that the ghost of Burns is permitted to come back to earth once a year, *Brigadoon*-style, to that very cottage; however, she is neither frightened nor impressed with the poet's unearthly romantic prowess. Irish playwright Duffy weaves contemporary and bawdy vernacular into the dialogue of both characters (Burns refers to his Wikipedia page as "fake news"), and this comedy also has the characters singing a few of the most well-known Burns songs. Following its initial run, the play toured Scotland in January and February 2020, played at the Oran Mor in July 2021, and will tour again to various locations in 2022.¹⁰⁴

Mary McCluskey, *Amadeus & The Bard: 18th Century Cosmic Brothers*.

Originally staged: Scottish Opera at Earlston High School in the Borders, 9 September, 2019. Not printed.

Music Director, Karen MacIver. Part of Scottish Opera's youth theatre program, this production, employing three professionals for the lead roles and a youth chorus, toured schools for six weeks. The conceit of this opera

¹⁰³ *Lanark Advertiser* (22 March, 2018), 42; *Broadwayworld.com* (5 August, 2019); <https://shonaghmurray.bandcamp.com/releases>.

¹⁰⁴ <https://cumbernauldtheatre.co.uk/events/the-ghosting-of-rabbie-burns>; Brett Herriot, "The Ghosting of Rabbie Burns" review, *Arts ScotsGay* online (9 February, 2020); Ann Fotheringham, "Meet the Star of The Ghosting of Robert Burns Which Comes to the Oran Mor," *Glasgow Times* online (29 January, 2020).

is the placement of historical contemporaries Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Robert Burns side by side in alternating scenes set in Poosie Nansie's, to explore the differences and similarities in their backgrounds, irreverent personalities, love affairs, interest in the supernatural, and artistic passions. Multiple performers played both men and the company had to switch styles between Scottish folk songs and Mozart's compositions.¹⁰⁵

Shonagh Murray, *Burns: A Lost Legacy*.

Originally staged: Fearless Players at the Gilded Balloon, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 31 July, 2019. Not printed.

Shonagh Murray wrote the book, original music, and lyrics for this examination of the aftermath of Burns's impact on Scotland, told with a cast of four and a piano. For the second time, Murray offers a view of Burns the way others saw him. The poet's granddaughter, Sarah Burns Hutchinson, has lost both of her children and decides to return from Australia to the United Kingdom to address what she sees as distortions of her grandfather's character and legacy.¹⁰⁶

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¹⁰⁵ "Opera review: Amadeus & The Bard, Auchinleck Academy," *The Scotsman* online (20 September, 2019); David Lewis, "Review—Amadeus and the Bard: 18th Century Cosmic Brothers," *The Edinburgh Reporter* online (2 October, 2019).

¹⁰⁶ <https://edinburghfestival.list.co.uk/article/110970-burns-a-lost-legacy/>;
<http://theawkwardcorner.com.au/theatre/2019/8/23/edfringe-bur>.